

News Conference on EA Cuts Aug. 24, '11

Barbara Sambasivam (Parent)

As a parent of a special needs student, I have to say I am really shocked by these numbers. I think all parents should be very concerned for their school –aged children, special needs or not.

Our family has had the services of Education Assistants for all of our son's school years. Rupan is 16 and entering Gr. 11. Because of cerebral palsy, which he was born with, he cannot use his hands. He cannot tie his shoes or feed himself. He is unable to write or hold a book and turn pages. He can't write out the steps to solve an algebra equation and he cannot build a project for science class or conduct a chemistry experiment. There is however, one thing that he can do – and that is **learn** and he **has learned**.

Rupan needed special school support from early on. He often shared the EA with other students and that was a good thing for him. He did not walk until age 4 and was not yet steady on his feet. The EA was needed to keep him safe in crowded hallways and on the playground. She assisted him getting on & off buses. His speech was impaired – the EA pulled him from class to practice speech drills given by the system Speech & Language Path. She assisted him in the washroom and fed him

at lunch. Later on when Rupan was using more technology, the EA helped him learn the special software he needed in order to type and do math computation on his own. When the teacher gave notes too quickly the EA typed for him. These are just a few of the many ways the EA supported him. They are not tasks a teacher can or should do.

Rupan plans to graduate from high school one day with a full Gr. 12. If he was here he would tell you himself, that he would not be where he is today without the skills and support of the many EA's who have devotedly worked with him. He knows that he would not succeed without the extra pair of hands that make his learning come to life.

I also want to say a word about how invaluable EA's are to teachers. Imagine **no EA** in the classroom. What would a teacher do with a student who could not do these things for himself? What do the other students do when the teacher is needed to do all those tasks for 1 or 2 special students? **EA's are needed in classrooms today**. Teachers are responsible for the learning of perhaps 25 or even 30 students including those with developmental and learning delays, hearing impairments,

behavior disorders and high emotional and medical needs. Many new students do not yet speak English. And that's not to mention the children who have not had basic needs met at home such as nutrition, warm clothing, enough sleep, a safe place to stay.

If we are to be a truly **inclusive education system** - and that's what we say we are - we must make sure that the **most vulnerable** of our students receive the same opportunities that regular students have. If that means providing an EA for a child in a special class to leave that class once a day to take woodworking, then that's what should be done. Why shouldn't he or she have the same satisfaction and pride in building their first project? The EA makes this possible.

Parents send their children to our schools with great hopes and expectations for their futures. It is no different for us who have a special needs child. The expectations may be different. For a non-verbal child confined to a wheelchair the hope may be that he or she could learn to answer yes or no, communicate their needs and interests to a classmate on a communication board, and learn to maneuver a power wheelchair by themselves. The hopes may be different but they have the same right to learn and **develop to their full potential** and I believe EA's play an integral role in making this happen. Please - **Let us not cut** any more EA's from our schools.